

SHONDA RHIMES TEACHES WRITING FOR TELEVISION



“

I've always been a person who was a storyteller. I don't think I knew I wanted to be a television writer or a screenwriter, but I've always been a storyteller. It's how I was made. —*Shonda Rhimes*

”

A FEW FACTS ABOUT SHONDA RHIMES

- ▶ Shonda was born and raised in Illinois.
- ▶ She is the youngest of six children.
- ▶ Shonda majored in English and film studies at Dartmouth College, and earned a Master of Fine Arts from the USC School of Cinematic Arts.
- ▶ Shonda's first television show, *Grey's Anatomy*, debuted on ABC in 2005. She went on to create and write the shows *Private Practice* and *Scandal*, and executive produce the shows *How to Get Away With Murder* and *The Catch* through her production company Shondaland.
- ▶ In 2015, Shonda published her memoir, *Year of Yes: How to Dance It Out, Stand in the Sun, and Be Your Own Person*.



HOW TO USE THIS CLASS

Before you dive in, we have a few recommendations for getting the most out of your experience.

THINGS YOU MIGHT NEED

To enjoy this class, you only need your computer and a desire to learn. However, here are a few other items we think will enhance your learning experience:



A

CLASS WORKBOOK

This printable PDF, filled with lesson recaps and assignments.

B

SUGGESTED VIEWING SCHEDULE

Shonda explains her techniques to you in 30 lessons. It's tempting to finish all of the lessons in one sitting. We'd like to recommend our suggested viewing schedule, which you'll find on page 5 of this Class Workbook.

C

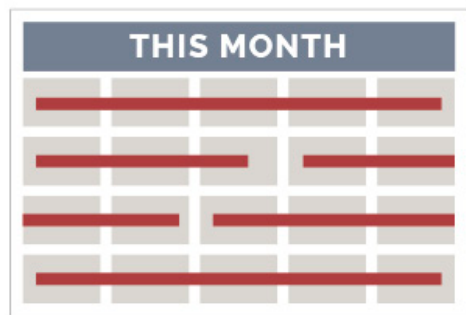
SHONDA RHIMES' TV SHOWS

Grey's Anatomy and *Scandal* are mentioned repeatedly in the class and are used as examples for many of Shonda's techniques. Keep at least the first season of each of these shows handy, either through a streaming application or on DVD.

D

WRITING MATERIALS

Whether you use pen and paper or a screenwriting software, you'll want to keep your writing tools handy throughout the class for taking notes and completing assignments.



THINGS YOU WILL SEE

Here are a few general tips for navigating your way around the class site:



LESSON VIDEOS

Watch and listen to Shonda explain the nuts and bolts of her process, one lesson at a time.



INTERACTIVE ASSIGNMENTS

Take advantage of the innovative tools and interactive assignments we've created to enhance your education.



LESSON DISCUSSIONS

Share your works in progress and ask your peers for help and support if you've hit a roadblock.



OFFICE HOURS

Submit questions for Shonda, and watch her previous Office Hours responses.



THE HUB

Continue connecting with your MasterClass peers in The Hub.



QUESTIONS & FEEDBACK

We want to hear from you!

Email support@masterclass.com

CLASS OUTLINE - SUGGESTED VIEWING SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

01 INTRODUCTION

02 TEACH YOURSELF TV WRITING

- ▶ Television vs. Film
- ▶ Read the News to Learn Storytelling
- ▶ Know Your Television
- ▶ Read and Dissect Scripts
- ▶ There Are No More Rules

03 FINDING AN IDEA

- ▶ Your Ideas Should Come From Everywhere
- ▶ Have a Place to Keep Your Ideas
- ▶ TV Ideas Don't Have Endings
- ▶ Good Ideas Are Sticky
- ▶ Ensure Your Idea Is Original
- ▶ Consider Your Idea in The Real World
- ▶ Know What the Marketplace Is Looking For

04 DEVELOPING THE CONCEPT

- ▶ An Idea vs. a Premise
- ▶ Let the Story Inform the Structure
- ▶ Decide the Tone of Your Show
- ▶ Be Thoughtful With Your Story Bible
- ▶ Don't Get Hung Up on Titles or Names

WEEK 2

05 RESEARCHING YOUR STORY

- ▶ Start With the Basic Resources
- ▶ Talk to People to Gain Invaluable Details
- ▶ Let Your Subject Talk
- ▶ Take Notes, But Remember to Listen
- ▶ Case Study: Researching *Grey's Anatomy*
- ▶ Case Study: Judy Smith and *Scandal*
- ▶ Research Until You Feel the 'Click'

06 CREATING MEMORABLE CHARACTERS PT. 1

- ▶ Fill Up the Lives of Your Characters
- ▶ You Don't Need to Know Every Detail
- ▶ Rethink Your Perspective and Have Compassion
- ▶ Don't Define Characters by Their Looks
- ▶ Case Study: Creating Olivia Pope

07 CREATING MEMORABLE CHARACTERS PT. 2

- ▶ Ensemble Characters Need to Harmonize
- ▶ Make Your Characters Active, Not Reactive
- ▶ Evolve Your Characters Naturally
- ▶ Use Visual Benchmarks to Reveal a Character's Journey
- ▶ Killing a Character
- ▶ Remain Focused on Your Character's Journey

WEEK 3

08 PITCHING YOUR SHOW

- ▶ How to Structure a Pitch
- ▶ Focus on Character
- ▶ Paint a Picture
- ▶ Don't Mention Actors or Music
- ▶ Make Your Pitch Market-Friendly
- ▶ Practice Your Pitch at Double-Time Speed
- ▶ Practice Your Pitch in Front of Friends
- ▶ Prepare a Mental Script When Meeting with Executives
- ▶ Shonda's Pitch for *Grey's Anatomy*
- ▶ Ultimately, It's About Your Writing Abilities

09 WRITING A SCRIPT: STRUCTURE

- ▶ The Five Acts of Television
- ▶ Always Know Where to End Your Acts
- ▶ Mapping Out A, B, and C Stories
- ▶ Know What the Rules Are Before You Break Them

10 WRITING A SCRIPT: PROCESS

- ▶ Have an Incubation Period Before Writing
- ▶ Write a Beat Sheet
- ▶ Develop an Outline
- ▶ Use Themes to Shape Your Episodes

CLASS OUTLINE - SUGGESTED VIEWING SCHEDULE

WEEK 4

11 WRITING A SCRIPT: EFFECTIVE HABITS

- ▶ Treat the Creative Process Like a Muscle
- ▶ Find the Ritual That Helps You Write
- ▶ Shonda's Writing Tools
- ▶ Write to a Schedule and Deadline
- ▶ If You Get Writer's Block, Switch Projects
- ▶ Develop the Process That Works for You

12 WRITING A SCRIPT: THE PILOT

- ▶ The Opening and Ending Scenes Are Key
- ▶ There Are No Wrong Choices
- ▶ Create a Character Who Guides the Audience
- ▶ Case Study: The Opening Scene of *Scandal*

13 WRITING AUTHENTIC DIALOGUE

- ▶ Deconstruct Dialogue in Other Shows
- ▶ Write Dialogue Like Real Conversations
- ▶ Don't Write Subtext as Dialogue
- ▶ Use Dialogue to Show Who Your Characters Are
- ▶ Actors and Dialogue

14-20 CASE STUDIES: GREY'S ANATOMY AND SCANDAL PILOTS

WEEK 5

21 EDITING YOUR SCRIPT

- ▶ Shonda's Editing Process
- ▶ Read Your Scripts Out Loud
- ▶ Cut Things That Don't Affect the Plot
- ▶ Use Feedback to Strengthen Your Scripts
- ▶ Case Study: *Grey's Anatomy* and Alex Karev
- ▶ Know When Your Script Is Cooked

22 BEYOND THE PILOT: WRITING A SERIES

- ▶ Episode 2 Is the Pilot, Again
- ▶ Fulfill the Promise of Your Show
- ▶ Use Every Idea That You Have
- ▶ Everything in Your Show Must Have a Point
- ▶ Be Versatile and Evolve Your Show
- ▶ Write Story Around Character, Not Vice-Versa

23 SCANDAL CASE STUDY: "IT'S HANDLED"

24 BREAKING INTO THE INDUSTRY

- ▶ Take the Job Over Film School
- ▶ Do Grunt Work With a Smile
- ▶ Build a Network of Your Peers
- ▶ Take Advantage of Writing Programs
- ▶ Don't Be Obnoxious
- ▶ Mentors
- ▶ Take the Time to Hone Your Craft
- ▶ Write No Matter What

WEEK 6

25 WORKING IN A WRITERS' ROOM

- ▶ Have an Original Voice and Opinion
- ▶ Talk and Be Ready With Ideas
- ▶ Your Pitches Should Center Around Character
- ▶ Study All Episode Drafts
- ▶ Support Your Fellow Writers
- ▶ Embrace the Culture of the Room

26 WORKING IN TV PRODUCTION

- ▶ TV Writing Is a Race Against Time
- ▶ Find a Non-Writing Producing Partner
- ▶ Learn From Your Line Producer
- ▶ Write Clear Action Descriptions to Help Production
- ▶ Vet Your Actors Before You Hire Them
- ▶ Sex Scenes
- ▶ Respect Your Crew

27 SHOWRUNNING

- ▶ Communicate Honestly
- ▶ Treat Studios as Your Creative Partners
- ▶ Delegate and Empower
- ▶ Manage Your Time Carefully
- ▶ Write Quickly
- ▶ Make Opportunities for Others
- ▶ Shonda's Journey as a Showrunner

01 INTRODUCTION

SHONDA RHIMES TEACHES WRITING FOR TELEVISION 7

WEEK 7

28 LIFE OF A WRITER

- ▶ Write Every Day
- ▶ Work/Life Balance Does Not Exist
- ▶ You Belong in Any Room You Enter
- ▶ Enjoy Your Accomplishments

29 SHONDA'S JOURNEY

30 CLOSING

NOTES